



BEST PRACTICES FOR COUNTIES: MEDICAID AND CRIMINAL JUSTICE POPULATIONS

Colorado's Medicaid expansion offers increased access to health coverage for criminal justice involved populations while creating new opportunities for budget savings for counties. For jail inmates, Medicaid can cover hospital services when an inmate is admitted to a hospital for more than 24 hours. Individuals on parole, probation or pretrial release are eligible for Medicaid as long as they meet income and other eligibility requirements. Medicaid coverage gives criminal justice involved individuals living in the community access to primary care, mental health treatment and substance abuse treatment, helping to reduce recidivism and meet basic needs.

Many counties are creating partnerships between their human service and criminal justice agencies to enroll criminal justice populations in Medicaid to leverage Medicaid funding for inmate hospital care. Colorado counties are as diverse as their residents and there is no perfect solution for every county or agency. The recommendations and best practices below may help counties to build partnerships, create budget savings, and connect criminal justice involved individuals with needed coverage and care.

1. Create relationships between county jails/sheriffs and county human services departments

- Designate a single point of contact at the jail and at the county human services department who serve as the principle liaisons between the two departments.
 - Designating liaisons between county departments can help eliminate confusion and improve communication.
- Establish regular meetings between jails and human services administrators in order to implement and maintain enrollment processes for hospitalized or releasing inmates.
 - Medicaid's [Regional Care Collaborative Organizations](#) and [Behavioral Health Organizations](#) may also participate in these meetings to help design processes that can connect Medicaid eligible releasing inmates with care upon release.
- Develop a method that allows for data and information to be shared between county departments.

The mission of the Department of Health Care Policy and Financing is to improve health care access and outcomes for the people we serve while demonstrating sound stewardship of financial resources.



- Data and information sharing can help the county track budget savings and hone enrollment processes for hospitalized and releasing inmates.

2. Utilize Medicaid to pay for inmates' inpatient hospital stays and help create budget savings

- Inmates are ineligible for Medicaid while incarcerated **except** when they are admitted to the hospital for more than 24 hours.

Agency letter 14-006

Agency Letter 14-011

- This coverage only applies to inpatient services rendered between admission and release.
- County jails are working with local human services offices to enroll hospitalized inmates, allowing Medicaid to cover some of inmates' hospital expenses.
 - A single inpatient hospital stay over 24 hours can cost tens of thousands of dollars and Medicaid may be able to cover most, if not all, of this cost.
 - These savings can be leveraged to fund staff that help enroll hospitalized and releasing inmates in Medicaid.
- Counties who utilize third party administrators or contractors for inmate health care should ensure that inpatient hospital services are not part of the services for which they pay the contractor and that inpatient hospitalizations are not built into any capitated payment rates.
 - Structuring jail health care contracts in this way will allow the county to realize savings from having Medicaid cover inmate inpatient hospitalizations.

3. Integrate county human service workers into the local criminal justice agency

- County Human service workers have the ability to process applications for Medicaid when hospitalized and for releasing inmates.
- Jails are repurposing some of the savings from having Medicaid pay for inpatient hospitalizations for inmates in order to pay for human service agency staff to be present part or full time in the county jail.
- County human service staff can help inmates fill out applications and process applications for inmates who are releasing.



- County workers have access to the Colorado Benefits Management System (CBMS) which allows them to process an inmate's application prior to release so that the releasing inmate can be eligible on the day of release.

4. Provide inmates with assistance and education on health care and Medicaid

- Jail employees should be trained in assisting inmates with applications
 - The Department of Health Care Policy and Financing or [Connect for Health Colorado](#) can offer training to staff in county jails who may be helping inmates to apply for health care coverage. Jails can contact HCPF staff below if they are interested in application assistance training.
- When appropriate and with inmate's approval, staff may fill out applications for inmates
 - Worksheet C of the paper application allows an individual to give another individual the authority to fill out and submit the Medicaid application on their behalf. This process can enable the county to fill out applications on behalf of inmates who become hospitalized.
- Jail/Detention facilities should consider offering education and training for inmates about the importance of health coverage and how to access health care.
 - Such an offering could inform inmates of the importance of health care coverage and help inmates fill out applications for Medicaid.
 - Inmates can learn about how to access health care, including the importance of primary care.
 - Additional information about accessing health care could be provided in materials provided to inmates upon release.

5. Provide opportunities for families of incarcerated persons to apply

- Inmate's families may have similar needs to inmates themselves. The time when families are waiting to visit with their incarcerated loved ones provides another opportunity to enroll individuals in coverage.
- Some counties have installed computer kiosks in the waiting rooms of the jail or courthouse that allow family members to apply for Medicaid, Child Health Plan *Plus* (CHP+) and other benefits online via [Colorado.gov/PEAK](#). Families may be able to be approved for Medicaid or CHP+ coverage in real time.
- Courts may wish to have human service department staff or health coverage guides stationed in the court room so family and friends of those appearing in court can ask questions and apply for coverage.



6. Establish connections with Pretrial services department to connect additional individuals with Medicaid staff working with Human Services

- Many individuals are temporarily detained in jails and may not be incarcerated long enough to be assisted with an application
- Pretrial services should work with jail and local human services to design a process that efficiently identifies people who miss applying for coverage in jail.
- Pretrial staff may seek training in helping individuals apply for coverage through the Department of Health Care Policy and Financing [Connect for Health Colorado's](#) Certified Application Counselors.
- Installing computer kiosks in the pretrial services offices may allow individuals another opportunity to apply for Medicaid and other benefits online via Colorado.gov/PEAK. Individuals residing in the community while their charges are pending disposition may be able to be approved for Medicaid or CHP+ coverage in real time.

7. Cultivate other partnerships between criminal justice agencies and agencies that can help clients enroll

- Due to resource limitations, human service departments may not have the ability to fully assist all the criminal justice agencies within their county.
- Some criminal justice agencies are partnering with health care providers that have been approved by the Department of Health Care Policy and Financing ([Medical Assistance Sites](#)) or Connect for Health Colorado ([Certified Application Counselors and Health Coverage Guides](#)) to help individuals apply. Probation departments utilizing navigators to help enroll their clients

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